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January 30, 2006

The Honorable George W. Bush
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Bush,

Tomorrow, as you deliver your State of the Union Address, I have invited disabled New York City paramedic, Marvin Bethea, to join us in the gallery as my guest. He will serve as a representative of one of the thousands who are still sick following their work at Ground Zero.

Last week, seventeen bipartisan Members of the New York Congressional delegation sent a letter to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Michael Leavitt, requesting the appointment of a 9/11 Health Czar. We believe that the health czar should be a seasoned health professional charged with coordinating the federal response to the 9/11 health emergency.

In coordination with the release of the letter, we were joined by a coalition of 9/11 responders, area residents, downtown workers and health professionals at Ground Zero to make the case for why this position is necessary. This coalition discussed the current condition of many of the men and women who rushed to Ground Zero and who were exposed to a poisonous cocktail of asbestos, lead, mercury, powdered glass and other carcinogens that were stagnating in the air. We heard from the federally-funded World Trade Center Medical Monitoring Program that of the 16,000 9/11 responders they have medically screened, half are still sick and that a similar program that has screened New York City Firefighters has had similar findings. We heard from David Keller, son of a New York City Emergency Medical Technician, about his father's health problems after 9/11 and his passing at age 41. We heard of others who responded to 9/11 and have apparently died from health-related problems stemming from 9/11. Lastly, we heard the personal story of Marvin Bethea, a paramedic who was dispatched to Ground Zero on 9/11.

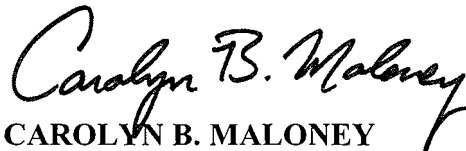
Mr. Bethea arrived at Ground Zero soon after the attack happened. He was a block away when the first tower fell and was buried alive, but managed to find his way out and immediately continued to help rescue others. Still working when the second building came down, he picked up a woman and pulled her into the Hilton Millenium and was buried again in the debris of the second collapse. Remarkably, he was able to crawl out of the debris again.

Mr. Bethea went back to Ground Zero on September 14th to assist with the rescue and recovery efforts. Five weeks later, he suffered a stroke attributed to the stress of 9/11. He lost use of his right arm and leg, but after physical therapy, he went back to work after 3 months. In May of 2003, Mr. Bethea was diagnosed for asthma and 9/11-related depression. He has been seeing a psychologist at Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York City since July of 2003. Despite his heroic service to our nation, Mr. Bethea's workers' compensation claim filed after 9/11 remains controverted and still under investigation.

I would like to remind you that this will be the third time that I have hosted a sick 9/11 responder as my guest during your State of the Union Address. During this time we have made progress in providing more federal funding for the medical monitoring of 9/11 responders, but the federal government's response to this health crisis remains woefully inadequate. More than four years after 9/11, we still have no coordinated federal response, medical monitoring programs have only been allowed to medically screen a fraction of the men and women who worked on the pile at Ground Zero, these programs have been barred from spending any federal funding on providing any medical treatment, and no program exists to screen lower Manhattan residents and workers or any of the estimated 10,000 federal employees who worked at Ground Zero.

It is my hope that as you lay-out your agenda for the upcoming year, you will remember the commitment you made to the heroes of 9/11 when you told them that "we will never forget." The appointment of a 9/11 Health Czar and advocating for full monitoring and treatment is certainly the least we can do for the men and women who risked their health to assist their country following the worst terrorist attack in our nation's history.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carolyn B. Maloney". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

CAROLYN B. MALONEY
Member of Congress